

## INTERVIEWS WITH JOHN YAREMKO

For the *Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project*  
Law Society of Upper Canada

Interviewee: The Honourable John Yaremko, QC (JY)

Interviewer: Allison Kirk-Montgomery (AKM), for The Law Society of Upper Canada

Also present, Hélène Yaremko-Jarvis (HYJ), niece of John Yaremko

Interview Dates : 18 March and 6 May 2009

Location: Home of John Yaremko, Ukrainian Canadian Care Centre, Toronto, Ontario

Transcribed by Allison Kirk-Montgomery and S. Webster, June 2009

[Transcript is not verbatim but has been edited by Hélène Yaremko-Jarvis and Allison Kirk-Montgomery to correct errors, to remove false starts and extraneous material, and to improve clarity for the reader. Longer comments or additions made by Hélène Yaremko-Jarvis during the review of the transcript are in italics and enclosed in square brackets. In 2009, when the interviews were conducted, and particularly during the second session, Mr. Yaremko was in deteriorating health, emotional, and sometimes confused. He was determined to fulfill his promise to participate in the *Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History* project. Mr. Yaremko died the following year.]

## THE FIRST SESSION

*Hon. John Yaremko interviews by Allison Kirk-Montgomery*  
*The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project*

18 March and 6 May 2009

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JY: Today is March 18.

HYJ: It's Wednesday.

AKM: The day after St. Patrick's Day, 2009. We are at 60 Richview, in Toronto.

JY: 60 Richview. It's the Ukrainian Canadian Care Centre.

AKM: And more important, it is the home of the Honourable John Yaremko.

JY: Thank you.

AKM: That's why I'm here, with Hélène Yaremko-Jarvis, your niece, and also a lawyer.

I am the only non-lawyer here, but I am here on behalf of the Law Society of Upper Canada, and it's an honour to be here as part of a project called *Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History*. And you are one of the lawyers that have made history for many years, both as a lawyer and as a politician, and I want to ask you about some of that, Mr. Yaremko.

I have one question that I want to start with. When I was doing a little bit of research, I was surprised to see how many Canadian Ukrainians there are in this country and the fact that this is the 3rd largest population of Ukrainians in the world. Of more than a million Ukrainian Canadians, you're one of the first to be called to the bar in Ontario, and I want to ask you how that happened?

JY: Now, the reason for Ukrainians coming to Canada was that there were two men who made their way to Canada, and they wrote back about the nature of the country.

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The government of Canada, in order to populate the West, they were giving free grants of land, I think it was three hundred acres of land. Of course, land was very scarce in the Ukraine. One of the strong features of the British system is the fact that when somebody dies, the most senior man takes everything. *[HYJ: In Ukraine, the property was divided among all children resulting in land holdings getting smaller and smaller.]* As a result, the ones that didn't inherit went to Australia, to Canada. That's how they populated the world...

Getting back to your question about how I came to be called to the Ontario Bar, I was born a very bright child.

AKM: I am not surprised.

JY: That's a great way to be born, you know, it doesn't take any effort to be born that way. But, I became a very hard worker, which does take effort. You're not born with that feature, I had to develop that.

When I was seven years of age, a man came to our house.

HYJ: Is this the house in Welland?

JY: Yes, Welland, Ontario. where I was born.

He got a very great deal of respect from my mother and my father. And after he left, I asked my father, "who is the man?" And he said, "He is a lawyer." Within some other period of time, another man came, and he got a great deal of respect from my parents. When he left, I asked, "Who was that man?" and the reply was, "He's an alderman, he's a politician." The other person who always got respect was the priest. So

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from then on, when people used to ask this seven-, eight-, nine-year old boy, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” I used to say, “I’m going to be a lawyer-politician.”

AKM: And you were right.

JY: I was right, and by golly, I feel very sympathetic to the young people who don’t know what course to take, because everything I did was to reach that goal.

AKM: Did your parents support you in that?

JY: My parents came from Austria-Hungary (there was no Ukraine at that time). My father [George Yaremko] stopped going to school at 9 years of age when his father died in an accident while ploughing the fields. My mother [Mary] went to school. She completed the gymnasium and won a scholarship to teachers’ college. Her father did not want her to go as he thought she had enough education for a girl. So she came to Canada. I remember a saying of the poet named Shevchenko, whose birthday we are celebrating this week, and he wrote a poem that begins,

“Learn my brothers,  
Dat-dat-da-dat..  
Take from others, but do not forget your own.”

*[Learn my brothers,  
Think and read.  
Learn from others  
But never spurn your own.]*

My mother taught me that. So from then on, I became a good student.

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AKM: You enjoyed school?

JY: I enjoyed it very much. The public school was in Hamilton.

AKM: What was the name of the school?

JY: Gibson Street School. Hamilton was the first multicultural city. Out West they were all Ukrainians; but in the east here the Ukrainians came to Hamilton. And I grew up in a multicultural neighbourhood, full of Polish, Ukrainians, Italians, Czechs, etc.

AKM: Did you move from Welland?

JY: Yes. We moved from Welland to Hamilton. I went to Gibson Street School and then the Prince of Wales School. When I went to Prince of Wales School, I was surprised that there were so many English boys and girls, but the very name of the school indicates the district and they could only speak one language.

AKM: How many could you speak?

JY: Ukrainian and English, the two. In keeping with the saying of Taras Shevchenko, who is the same as Robbie Burns is to the Scots, “learn from others, but do not forget your own.” A wonderful way to grow up.

AKM: Have you taken that as your motto?

JY: Oh, yes, except that I went beyond that. I did pay attention to my own, but I took interest in all others. As a matter of fact, I was the one that coined the word “multicultural.” We’ll get to that in due course.

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AKM: Tell me a little bit more about your childhood and your family.

JY: Well, my father worked in the steel company and he ended up having ten children. While I was still at home, there were eight of us.

HYJ: That's because my grandmother had twins, very late in life, and he was away at university then.

JY: Yes. I got a letter from my brother, my older brother, saying, "we are blessed, God-given, twice over."

HYJ: That's my father.

JY: It was the twins, a boy and a girl.

AKM: Amazing. Where did you come in among the ten?

JY: I was second eldest. My brother was the oldest and I was second. How a mother, a wife of a labourer of lowest pay level, managed, what appeared to be without difficulty, to raise ten children is beyond my comprehension. I don't remember being hungry. We were always clean. I don't know what the clothing was but it was always very very clean. Of course there was no television, there were no outside diversions at the time, the way there is now for young people.

AKM: Did you used to go to the old Hamilton Public Library, the main branch?

JY: Yes. Did you know Hamilton?

AKM: I grew up in Hamilton too.

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JY: First of all, before I went there, I was walking on Barton Street, one of the chief thoroughfares. It started to rain, and I saw people standing in the entrance of this building. They were going in and out of the rain, and I ran up the stairs to get out of the rain too. I noticed that they were going in and out of this doorway and nobody was taking tickets, so I knew it wasn't a theatre. As I stepped in, a young lady stepped forward and said, "Are you a member?"

Oh, I'm going to be in difficulty, I thought. I knew what a member of a church was. I said, "No."

She said, "Well, I will lend you five cents, and you will pay me five cents, and I will give you a card with your name on it, and you can go and take books home and bring them back."

I said, "I haven't got a nickel."

She again said, "I will lend you a nickel." I thought this was absolutely marvellous!

She said, "Give me your hands," and I did it and she put a nickel there. "Now I've loaned you the nickel.

Now you pay me the nickel and I'll get you the card." So we went through the motions. Then she said, "Now take three books," and I ran to the shelves.

Oh, when I walked in—I grew up in the country, well, I had never seen a hardcover book! Oh, all the books in the world were there. So I walked to a shelf and I pulled three books off. She looked at them, and smiled, and wrote them down. I ran home

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with my treasure. And then I opened the book: an anthropology book. Pictures and words. I couldn't imagine these animals that they had. So I read all through those three books. The next day I was there again. That summer I literally read through the Barton Street branch, that was Barton and Gibson library, and then I moved to the downtown branch. But you could imagine the information this little head garnered. Unrelated and everything, but it was all going into the head.

AKM: You must have got very good marks at school.

JY: I did. I stood first all my life. Then when we moved from Gibson Avenue school to Prince of Wales, there was a track meet going on in the stadium there, it's now called Ivor Wynne Stadium. My friend Charlie Zsymlinski, my closest friend, who was a year older than me and he was already broad-shouldered and strong, was very taken up by this track meet. We learned that the school having the track meet was Hamilton Central Collegiate Institute. So we both decided we would go to Central Collegiate Institute the next day to enroll.

The next morning I got up and I walked to his house. I said, "Where's Hamilton Central Collegiate Institute?"

He said, "You're the bright one. Don't you know?"

I said, "No." And we went to a police station.

HYJ: Well, what happened was they saw this track meet going on. (I've heard this story) Charlie was an incredible athlete and he decided he wanted to go to a school that had a track and a sports programme. Where they lived everybody went to the

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technical school because that was what was available in the immigrant area. They didn't have an academic type of high school. So they decided they wanted to go to that school.

*[HYJ: Charlie Zsymylinski was my uncle's very best friend. Uncle John told me that on one occasion when my grandfather's hydro was cut off due to arrears and there was only candlelight at night in the house, Charlie's mother had Uncle John sleep at their house so he could study for exams.]*

JY: But we don't know where the school is. And we went to a police station.

HYJ: This is on the first day of school.

JY: The police told us where Hamilton Central was, way up under the Mountain. It burnt down, it's no longer there. Fortunately, my mother had given me a nickel to buy lunch with, and so had his mother, and we took the three cents to take the street car because it's right across town. We got to the school. Nobody was around.

A man came out and said, "What do you want?"

We said, "We came to register."

"Oh," he said, "They're up in the auditorium there, on the third floor."

And we ran up, very scared, because it was the first day of school and we were half an hour late. We came in, and they had five hundred kids lined up alphabetically, for registration.

AKM: I know where you went.

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HYJ: And Charlie Zsymlinski as well. Is he an S or a Z?

JY: He's a Z. I'm a Y.

But another relevant part. The day before school my mother had taken me to Eaton's downtown, and bought me a pair of knickers. At that time, boys up to eleven wore knickers, and after that they wore long pants. I was the only one in short pants and knickers. I would have preferred to be naked! That's why I am so sympathetic to kids, what peer pressure can do.

AKM: That's right. So you went to a very good high school because you were interested in sports. Almost accidentally, is that right?

JY: Yes, that's right. But I was not the one interested in sports.

HYJ: Charlie was.

JY: He was, my best friend, was interested in sports. I just wanted to go to a high school. I had heard that there were such things as high schools.

AKM: Where did you live, Mr. Yaremko?

JY: Down by Sherman and Barton. At that time we were living down by [International] Harvester, down by the Bay. It was a long way to the school. I had no trouble walking. As a matter of fact it was very good for me because I took Latin lessons and I memorized the Latin book walking to and from school. I was working all the time.

AKM: So you always loved learning.

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JY: Oh, very much so!

AKM: And your parents must have too, did they?

JY: Well, my mother did. My father was too busy, I guess, fixing up the house and everything.

HYJ: And working at Stelco.

JY: My mother had gone to school under the regime in Austria-Hungary.

AKM: Did she learn English ever, your mother?

JY: Yes.

AKM: And your father?

JY: Well, he learned English too, because the factory was all English. My mother with the kids, the kids all spoke English. They learned English quite well.

AKM: So your brothers and sisters, I have a feeling they would have been good at school, too, some of them.

JY: They were good but not exceptional. They were always very good but not exceptional. My brother who was older than I was—

HYJ: That's my father.

AKM: Michael, was it?

JY: Yes. He was streamed into a technical school to learn a trade, and the trade that he specialized in was motor mechanics. There was only one trouble, and it was that nobody in our whole area owned a car and there was no garage. It was at the other end of town.

HYJ: And my father was not at all mechanical.

JY: No.

HYJ: My father was actually very bright.

JY: He had no interest in that. But he had to learn a trade.

So what he did was—very bright—next to the technical school was a girls' school for typing and so on.

HYJ: Commercial.

JY: He enrolled! They were so startled, I guess.

AKM: That they let him go?

JY: They registered him! He learned how to do shorthand and type. After he graduated, he couldn't get a job anywhere in Hamilton, so he went to Ottawa and lived in a rooming-house full of French Canadians. So between typing, and shorthand and learning French and that, he was very well equipped to work in a specialized office. So he did. I don't think it was the Income Tax Department.

HYJ: It was the Income Tax Department. He eventually became an accountant.

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JY: He saw the kind of life that I was developing, apart from school. Seeing an orchestra for the first time. Instruments that I'd never seen. I told my mother that the violin was so big they had to stand it on the floor! Nobody knew any violins except the ones at weddings.

AKM: I get the feeling that your family stayed in the one area of Hamilton and that you going to high school opened up many doors for you, is that right?

JY: Yes, oh, absolutely. Charles, who was also a good student, not first but a good student, Charles and I, we spent all day long at school. We didn't go home for lunch. In the noon hour, we were interested in Shakespeare and the plays, and we both participated in the plays. The first play was the one with the three witches in it.

AKM: *Macbeth*.

JY: And we were just youngsters, just kids.

AKM: It's hard to imagine that the language of Shakespeare would have a lot of meaning for you.

JY: Oh yes! So we applied to go into *Macbeth*, just a couple of kids. But they gave us the parts of the three witches, two of the three witches. So my mother made a big hairdo out of her mop and a black piece of rubber for the coat, and Charles' mother did the same. And a make-believe fire, with electric lights, and we squealed, "Where has thou been, sister? /Killing swine." Nobody knew who these two performers were!

And that led to Julius Caesar. He was Julius Caesar and I was Brutus. This was a level of learning – that whole era that we belonged to – had no knowledge of the ...One day, we were staying for lunch and we knew about the stage upstairs and, you know what the devil does with idle hands?

AKM: Yes.

JY: We went up there to the stairs and to the platform of the stage, and they had all the equipment up there for the plays. I remember I was pretending – I had a spear and a shield . We were not destructive, we were just playing, careful.

And then I heard this voice: “What are you doing?”

The principal, who lived close by the school, had decided to stay for lunch this day. He said to this young boy, “You people come here and you think you can do anything.”

I was always independent. I said, “You don’t look like an Indian to me.”

He went red in the face and said, “I’ve got a good mind to expel you.”

I got down on my knees, and said, “Please don’t do that. If I come home and tell my father that I’ve been expelled, he will kill me.” And he would! He’d probably beat me so badly, because they were so proud, the whole neighbourhood – My boy goes to high school! They didn’t even hear of high school. And here he had a son there! So they were very proud.

AKM: “You people”, that’s what the principal said to you. He said to you, “You people.”

HYJ: He meant the immigrants.

JY: When I told him our names were Yaremko and Zsymlinski.

HYJ: But there’s good ending to this story.

JY: So he said, “You come to my office tomorrow,” and in the meantime he checked on us. He found out that I had stood first not in the class but in the whole high school. I stood first, and my friend, even though he was twelve and too young to play for the teams, he was already practising football and basketball with the teams because he was so good.

HYJ: He was a real star.

JY: The captains were looking forward to having him on the teams in the years ahead. Two years later he would be able to play. He could catch, and throw, and run. How can you expel the two of us then?

So, I guess it was for about a month, we used to come to his office and stand in the corner.

AKM: That was your punishment?

JY: I would prefer to have been strapped!

AKM: You say that now, Mr. Yaremko!

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JY: For two boys to stand in a corner, teachers walking in and out, looking and wondering—

AKM: —what had you done.

JY: We pretended in the beginning, talking to each other, that we had business there.

And while there [at high school], we were going to a Sunday school in our neighbourhood, the United Church Sunday School—that was the only church. There was no Orthodox Church at that time. *[HYJ: The United Church also sent them to summer camp and, through the Junior Board of Trade, sponsored the Boys' Council that he and Charles ran for.]*

HYJ: No Ukrainian Orthodox Church then.

JY: The Junior Board of Trade were sort of looking after us. Hamilton had what they called a Boy's Council, for boys under 21. They met in the City Hall in the same way that the City Council met. They had no power, nothing, but there was a Junior Board of Trade Supervisor and he persuaded—

AKM: He persuaded you to join?

JY: Yes, he persuaded us to run for the Council. Charles and I did. It was so interesting. Of all the things of my youth that I preserved, I found one card. It said, "Boys! Boys! Vote John Yaremko and Charles Zsymlinski." I still have that one card. We were elected as aldermen.



AKM: Who elected you?

JY: The boys.

AKM: It was to do with your school though? Or it was a separate Hamilton organization.

JY: No, no. The Junior Board of Trade ran this for the City Council for twenty-one and under. We were very young to run.

AKM: Did you campaign?

JY: Yes, we campaigned. I remember he and I, I saved up fifty cents, and he saved up fifty cents, and for a dollar, we bought a hundred – can you imagine, a hundred leaflets, a penny apiece -- “Vote John Yaremko and Charles Zsymlinski.” And so we served on the City Council. On a certain day we could go wherever we wanted to, the jail, the hospital, the water works, whatever it was. I, for some reason, I guess because nobody else wanted it, became chairman of what they called the Social Service Committee. It had to do with the hospital, and going to homes where seniors were.

AKM: So that was another way you experienced other parts of the city?

JY: Yes. I was fourteen years of age, to have this very adult [responsibility.] It was under the supervision of the Junior Board of Trade. It was serious business. We couldn't do anything, but when we visited the hospital, jails and the waterworks, the staff

put their best foot forward. Boys or no boys, they were going to make sure we gave a good report.

AKM: Now hearing that, why did you go to law school? Why didn't you go right into politics?

JY: I was just a boy!

AKM: I know, but you probably would have had that choice.

JY: Well, we finished high school.

HYJ: Tell her about all your scholarships.

JY: By that time I had learned about the university.

AKM: I see.

JY: Now in those days, you could become a lawyer by articling to a law firm and working for seven years.

AKM: Yes, you didn't need to go to university.

JY: That's right. You didn't need to go to university. There was a lawyer in Hamilton, Theodore Humeniuk, who went to the same Ukrainian Orthodox church that I did, who became a lawyer that way. But he was already a senior. *[HYJ: Uncle John knew of Humeniuk in Hamilton where the latter practised law but met him in Toronto (where Humeniuk lived with his family) when he began to attend the same church as Humeniuk in Toronto with Aunt Mary and her family.]* [He was] a great friend of my wife's family,

very active in the church, an older man, he must have been 45 when he became a lawyer that way. Seven years' articleship in all.

AKM: And did you know him, as a young person?

JY: Yes, I went to the same church in Toronto while at U of T and knew of him from Hamilton. Yes. He got a good deal of respect from the community there. I had also had an earlier exposure to lawyers when a lawyer visited our house and got all sorts of respect. By that time, as a senior in high school, I was aware that the law profession was being a professor of sorts.

AKM: And the value placed on a university degree.

JY: That's right. Now, my only hope to go to university from high school was to win scholarships. At that time, there was no government assistance of any kind. So I wrote for the scholarships, and I will say this, I don't know how the teachers..(there seems to be some argument about how they behave) but in those days, the teachers really took an interest in me, to assist me, in this scholarship business. Everybody knew me as a student. I had stood first in my year. Charles Zsymlinski, who was then fifteen, he was permitted to play football, so we both had high marks and that. The universities had scholarships, so I wrote for the University of Toronto, that had the biggest selection.

HYJ: When you say you wrote, you mean you applied for these scholarships?

JY: Yes.

HYJ: They had application forms.

AKM: You weren't automatically—

JY: Universities had different scholarships, and I wrote the ones for the University of Toronto.

AKM: Was that the only one that you sat for?

JY: Yes, the only one. And I won eleven years tuition! The highest in Ontario.

HYJ: He won enough scholarships to keep him going for eleven years but some of them were overlapping.

AKM: That must have been a great day in the Yaremko household.

JY: Oh, it was. The other kids who were just growing up after me were aware that something big had happened to me. My brother, in the meantime, who had been streamed into motor mechanics – it was too bad that he didn't go to high school because..

AKM: He was a natural student as well.

JY: A natural student. So I took up mathematics and physics.

HYJ: At U of T in first year.

AKM: Why?

JY: Because one of my high school teachers believed that “a good grounding in mathematics fitted a man for anything.”

AKM: And you wanted to be fitted for anything.

JY: Yes, anything. So I took the mathematics and physics, I owed him that. But by the time the midterm came along, the Dean and I agreed that since I was going to go into law, I should go in as early as possible. Because my whole character, my interests, behaviour - I was on the debating team – things like that indicated that I was...I passed, but I had no interest, didn't spend time studying mathematics and physics.

AKM: Where did you live when you were at University of Toronto?

JY: That was quite a thing. One of the things that I won was one year's free residence. So I was in residence for one year, at University College, which is the college I chose. I have nothing against university residence but it's an awful waste of time.

AKM: Do you think so?

JY: Oh. Hanging around in the evenings. I don't know, maybe I am being unfair, I expect I am, but there's a lot of hanging around, filling in time, talking about things that happened to you today.

AKM: This was in the faculty of law?

HYJ: No. In the residence.

JY: The law school was not recognized at that time. You had to go to Osgoode Hall Law School at that time to be admitted to the bar.

AKM: Even if you'd already got your degree.

JY: Yes. That was going to be a very important part in my life. I enjoyed going to the university. I belonged to the debating club, things like that, but in the one year I spent in the residences, there was a lot of hanging around.

AKM: So you were happy to move out from there?

JY: Not happy, but reconciled. I had no money. I was broke all the time. You know where the University is, and you know where Queen Street is, and St. George leads down to it. I took that route one day. There was a store and there was a lot of excitement around it as the store had been broken into. It was the only one broken into as it was the only one with no signs of life around it in the evening. I had been knocking on doors looking for a place to move to. I saw that the store had an attic so I suggested to the shopkeeper that maybe I could stay there because lights coming on and off would indicate that somebody's there, rather than the dark. So he agreed and he got me a mattress and a chair, and I moved into that attic.

AKM: That sounds tough.

JY: Tough? Listen to this. A mattress is a mattress, whether it's on a floor or whether it's on a spring bed. That's all that a body needs is a mattress. And a chair to sit on. I got up and I walked up St. George to Hart House, went for a swim and a shower, first thing in the morning. How lucky can you be?

AKM: What about food?

JY: Well, that was always a problem. I used to find restaurants that had cheap items on their menu. Most of the time, I ate breakfast on Queen Street. I remember I always had—This is terrible: “What will you have?” said the waiter, as he stood there picking his nose.

“Two hard boiled eggs,” I said. [laughs]

AKM: Somehow I don’t believe that story!

JY: I heard from somebody that hard boiled eggs were the most hygienic as they are in shells and not contaminated! Two hard boiled eggs. And then Hart House had their dining room. The nicest thing about the Hart House dining room was they put the loaf of bread on the table, raisin bread of all things, and I just ate slice after slice. I really did. I knew about filling the stomach up and that the stomach stored everything you eat in the meal. Then I’d go to classes all day. In the evening, I had no point in going back to an attic room so I went to the library and studied, nice and comfy and warm. The University of Toronto library, it was a very comfortable place to be in.

AKM: I’m thinking you kept your high marks!

JY: Instead of being a hindrance, it was an asset. Every once in a while I visited my friends at the residence, but I didn’t hang around night after night.

HYJ: Tell her about your ketchup sandwiches.

AKM: Some things don’t change.

JY: I noticed when I went into a restaurant, they always had bottles of ketchup on the table. And somehow I knew ketchup was good for you, because it had sugar and calories. And I'd take the bottle of ketchup, I forget what I'd pay for the sandwich, I'd eat the whole bottle. To this day, I marvel at the fact that in restaurant after restaurant, never did any proprietor say, "Just a minute. What are you doing with that ketchup?" And I was paying nothing for the ketchup, I was having a sandwich, or liver and onions. I didn't know that there was calves' liver and chicken liver and pigs' livers.

HYY: Just liver.

JY: Just liver. Pigs liver was very cheap. Between the pigs' liver and the ketchup I was having meals.

Once I became interested in being in politics I joined the debating club and I noticed on the bulletin board that somebody from the United States, not Franklin D. Roosevelt but somebody [who worked] with Roosevelt, was coming up to speak. (I was already taking an interest, thanks to the Boys Council in Hamilton, and the respect we got as members of the Boys Council. We sat there and the Council went through the motions. It was a lot of fun.) So he was coming to speak, so I attended Convocation Hall to listen to him. He was with Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his party. At the end, they said, everybody is invited to a reception. Everybody. That includes me. I had no idea what a reception was. So I went to the reception. The ladies were serving sandwiches, little diamond-shaped sandwiches. I ate nineteen. They were tiny, but nineteen!

From then on—



AKM: You liked receptions!

JY: I looked at the bulletin boards and went every time there was a reception. So I got a reputation! That Yaremko, wonderful student, he's not just hanging around and going to lectures, he goes to listen. After a while, the teachers begin to notice you. I was always very small, a kid in an adult audience, very noticeable. So something you would think was a handicap was really turning out to be an asset, because any student could have listened to one of the top people in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. So we were listening to people who were very important. That was in the Depression, it was either finishing or starting.

AKM: I was going to ask you what years you were at the university?

JY: From '36 to '41. That was during the quote Depression unquote. I was listening to what Franklin D. Roosevelt's people were talking about. Of course he was a great president of the people of the United States. He held that nation together at the worst of times.

AKM: Did you feel that at the time? Did you realize that?

JY: Oh yes.

AKM: So you took an interest in the history and politics of the States.

JY: Yes, of the United States. In fact, he used to be on the radio once a week. I used to imitate him. "We the people of the United States of America." He was very proud that he was an American. They weren't going to let anything beat them down, whether it was war or depression. I can remember, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

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That's how I learned, from his mannerisms, how you could make a terrific speech. But you had to leave something that people remembered. And in all my speeches I always made sure that there was a sentence or two in it that the listener would walk away with. I imitated him over and over again. I was a great admirer.

AKM: So you learned a lot from him and from the receptions. What about law school and the teachers there?

JY: Oh, the teachers were marvellous.

AKM: Who do you remember?

JY: The thing about teachers – I found them to be always fair, and treat the students equally.

AKM: Treat you or everybody?

JY: Everybody, but they loved good students. A teacher who sees a child, a boy or girl, absorbing what that teacher intended to do is very pleased. I never felt as if I was being treated specially, but I got along splendidly with all of them. All of them knew what my personal condition was, they knew that I was a scholarship winner, that I only had the money I saved from the summertime.

AKM: How many other boys were scholarship winners?

JY: At the university?

AKM: Yes.

JY: There might be, oh, a dozen, I think.

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AKM: Out of...?

JY: Oh, hundreds. The good students really stood out, the extra good students. At that time, because of this free tuition that I had, I had no hesitation staying at the university as long as possible. The Dean was W. P. M. Kennedy, who taught us constitutional law, which was not taught at Osgoode. Osgoode Hall taught you how to be a lawyer.

AKM: Practical.

JY: Practical law. Constitutional law, and then there was labour law—

AKM: So you had a more academic approach to the law.

HYJ: Did you have contracts or torts?

JY: Yes, contracts, torts. Bora Laskin, who was just out of university himself at the time, he taught us. He became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. Then there was W.P.M Kennedy, the Dean. Then the law school was in a big house on St. George. It wasn't a school building, it was a home that had been converted. The Dean had his office there and he lectured in it. It was big enough to hold the class. The telephone would ring. He would say, "If that's the prime minister he knows better than to call me during class." Everybody would wink at each other. But by golly, I was in the classroom one time, and the telephone rang. It was after class hours and I forget what I was doing there, learning something extra or whatever. The telephone rang, and he said, "Answer that telephone, John." So I answered it, and by golly, it was the Prime Minister!

"Is that for me?"

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It was the Secretary for the Prime Minister [William Lyon Mackenzie King] wanting to speak to Dean Kennedy. “Please tell him that the Prime Minister wishes to speak to him.”

So from then on, when the telephone rang—

AKM: No more winking!

JY: No more winking.

AKM: So that was university. What about Osgoode?

JY: Osgoode Hall had no scholarships, no assistance at all. But by that time I had learned that you had to be articled.

AKM: At the same time as you were going to lectures.

JY: I became the highest paid student. I was getting \$15 a week in my articles. Because I was producing, I was doing. The clients didn’t know who did the law, who did the matter for them. I was really looking after matters for the senior.

AKM: What firm was that?

JY: Elliot, Hume, McKeague and Hume.

JY: ...I chose one of the big firms in Toronto.

AKM: Which firm was that?

JY: I'd rather not mention it. It was one of the top firms. The manager was very interested, he was a scholar himself, very interested.

He said, "I think Mr. Yaremko, we could get together." He said, "Of course we'll change your name."

I was stunned. First time in my life. I said, "Change my name?"

He said, "Oh, and we won't charge you."

AKM: You mean, legally change your name?

JY: I didn't say anything. I was stunned. My name, John Yaremko? The name is very highly regarded. So I thought about this nine-year old boy trying to get a job with the newspaper – "We'll get in touch with you"; and the bank, laughing. I hesitate to bring these things up because I'm not complaining.

AKM: Why?

JY: I don't know.

AKM: This is part of your story.

JY: But the world has changed tremendously, Toronto, the city, in this regard. It has changed. I don't want to cast a reflection. You see, I'm not naming names.

AKM: Yes. But there's still discrimination.

JY: Oh, there was!

AKM: Now.

JY: But that's one of my [interests]. I'm no longer in the world, but I still take an interest..[Mr. Yaremko looks through his newspapers]

HYJ: He gets newspapers delivered here.

AKM: [Are you looking for] a story about discrimination today?

JY: One of the difficulties, one of the weaknesses of diversity is about how, in certain areas, women don't have a chance. It's in the papers. If I were active, I'd be on the stage on behalf of the women. The diversity of this city is so great that if you want to get something done you have no option. But you can still have a choice whether you are going to have a male or a female. There was quite an article on it; I hadn't realized.

AKM: Well, I distracted you from your story because that was a critical point, it seems, in your own personal growth, was being asked to change your name. Am I right?

JY: Yes. But I didn't change it.

HYJ: So what did you do when that lawyer said that?

JY: I turned around and walked out of his office. Fortunately, as I walked out of his office – it was one of the Bay Street offices, on the other end of the hall was another law firm, Elliott Hume McKeague and Hume. Now I had been the president of the University Law Club, and Fred Hume, whose name was up there, had been a president of the law club when he was at the university. And there used to be a continuous advising people as to who the incoming presidents were, and what firm they were with, so he

would have seen my name in the news books that the law club had. So I just walked right in. And I still think that was a very fortuitous thing for me, because what happened to me here in this law firm, was within minutes wiped out because of signing the articles with Fred Hume.

AKM: Did you tell him?

JY: About what had happened? No, I didn't. Again, as I say, it was a respectable law firm. In fact, I don't think he realized what he was doing, when he said, "We'll change your name."

AKM: Pragmatic?

JY: But he knew, I guess—he must have been concerned about his clientele seeing this name.

AKM: Do you think he was right at all that the clientele would be hesitant?

JY: At that time, if they weren't hesitant, they'd wonder what I was doing there. I'm sure there were enough others that could be fitted in. That's one of the problems about non-discrimination. Every time a woman is appointed, you realize it; you realize, when Michaelle Jean was appointed Governor-General in Canada, there's no man in pants sitting there. If she hadn't come along, I might have been the one was that was sitting there. There isn't two of everything. For a great many things there is only one. The Ukrainians have been very fortunate; they've had their Governor-General. Diefenbaker appointed one.

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HYJ: That was Ray Hnatyshyn. And Diefenbaker, was he German?

JY: Yes, way back a hundred and fifty years. And human nature being what it is—I don't sympathize with the ones that are left out, but I could see them being disappointed that they would not be chosen. As I said, when she became Governor General, a man was left out.

AKM: Yes. So did your articles with Elliot Hume and so forth. Did you learn? Were your articles a good preparation?

JY: Excellent. Now this was war time, the beginning of wartime when I became articulated. One of the members of the law firm had been a major in the First War. So twice a week he was down training the university students who were enlisted in the Officers' Training Corps. He used to come in on Saturday mornings and send out bills.

AKM: That you had done the work for?

JY: Yes. I never had a complaint from any [client]. Oh, he would always introduce me to the client, and say, "John Yaremko is associated with me, and if there's anything you want to know, why, please get in touch with him." Directly with him.

AKM: So you felt that was fair recognition of your work?

JY: Oh yes. But I was also getting \$15 a week.

AKM: Which was a lot. What do you think other people were getting at that time?



JY: Oh, they were getting seven, eight, nine dollars. My money worries had ceased pretty well.

AKM: No more ketchup sandwiches?

JY: Well, it all depends if I went to the rugby games on Saturday afternoons, I'd eat ketchup sandwiches. But once I got that \$15 a week, it was enough to struggle along very nicely.

AKM: Did you have enough time for study?

JY: Oh yes. I was really getting a training doing his work for him at the law firm. It's a little bit of a rigmarole for the senior to spend time with a student, the time he could be spending directly on his work. It worked out very well. McKeague. He was very content with my [work]. He went over my work very carefully every Saturday afternoon, very carefully over what I had done.

AKM: And so you learned then too. He might have reviewed some of your work at that point with you?

JY: Oh yes, some aspect of the work that I had omitted. But I was articled to the firm, but most of my time was spent looking after his business. So I got a very good grounding as an articling student.

[HYJ reminds AKM that JY's dinner is arriving at any moment]

AKM: Well, let me see, can we get you called to the bar before you have your dinner? I mean, when were you called to the bar.

JY: I was called in absentia [in 1944]. I'd become a junior officer in the army and I was called in absentia. They called them in absentia so that the person, in answering a question as to his vocation, could say, "I'm a lawyer." That was very thoughtful, I thought, on the part of the Law Society to do that. Then when we came back to practise law, actually, we were called in persona, a second time, just to sort of back up the fact that the calling up had been [in absentia]. I thought that was one of the more understanding acts on the part of the Law Society because if they hadn't called you in absentia, and somebody said what do you do, how do you explain to them that I'm a lawyer but I'm not practising law? I thought for a hard-nosed bunch of men like the Law Society it was a nice thing. I think I must have my original set of documents that show "in absentia." But then when I got out of the army, and came back to civilian life, I was called in persona and went through taking the oath.

AKM: Is there anything else you'd like to add about Osgoode? Tell me.

JY: Well, I hesitate about this. One of the persons that I had gone through law with was Charles Dubin. When I graduated from Osgoode, he got the Gold Medal, and I got the Bronze Medal. But – and this is not an excuse – but in my last year, what happened, I now had to look after myself completely. I used to take classes late afternoon, and at 5:30, when they were through, I would take a streetcar from there up to Sunnyside, where I had a job in a beer store, taking empty bottles. I would work in the beer store until 10:30 at night-time. This is not an excuse. *[HYJ: Uncle John was trying to express the idea that he did not have as much time to study as other students because he had to work through the school year to earn money to support himself.]*

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AKM: But some of your classmates didn't have to do that.

JY: Charles Dubin didn't have to do that.

HYJ: Who got the silver medal, Uncle John, do you remember?

JY: There was no silver medal. At least I don't recall it. But I thought that this beer store man was very understanding. By the time I was through the class and on the streetcar up to Sunnyside, I'd get there about quarter to six. He would check me in, that I had shown up, then I would go across the road to a restaurant and eat, and then I'd come back and work until 10:30. That's a weak or lame excuse, and I, of course, had very little time except weekends to study—

AKM: And I think you must, around this time, be starting to see your future wife, Mary [Materyn, whom you married in 1945], too, weren't you?

JY: Yes. I met her at a dance at a church. She lived in St. Catharines at the beginning, she had become a nurse. I would visit her on weekends. There used to be a boat from Toronto to Port Dalhousie, and I would go over and spend the day with her. She was very understanding. We were both very nicely in love with each other.

AKM: I think that's a nice note to stop on, because this is your dinner coming.

JY: Did you ever see by chance the movie, "How to Marry a Millionaire?"

AKM: No.

JY: Well, there is a very beautiful movie star. She's one of the three. She meets a young man and he invites her to join him for the weekend in the country. She goes.

There's this magnificent log cabin, huge, magnificent, and he takes her out to the veranda, and he says, "I'm going to show you my forest."

She says, "Your forest?"

He says, "Yes. See that road there, follow my hand. See that tree there, that's all mine."

(Oh what was her name?) She says, "That's all yours? Show me again."

AKM: Is this what Mary said to you?

JY: No, no. [laughs]

AKM: What made you think of it?

JY: She's in St. Catharines, and I'm in the camp where the river joins the lake at Niagara. I came up to visit her and we crossed over. From the Canadian side, you see beautiful falls, and from the American side, you see beautiful Canadian [falls], beautiful Canada. So I took her over, and I said, "See that fog? See the road there, watch my hands, see where it ends?" I said to her, "Marry me and it's all yours."

She said yes. That's how we—

HYJ: —tied the knot, or decided to.

JY: I was in the army at the time. I've often thought that girls who married the men in the armed services were really something because they didn't know what condition the man was going to be in when they returned. I never was faced with that

problem. I started to go to training camps, there were five in Canada, and I was sent to one camp, then to another camp.

[dinner arrives]

AKM: Thank you Mr. Yaremko. I look forward to continuing this fascinating conversation. [end]

## THE SECOND SESSION

AKM: Today is May 6<sup>th</sup> 2009. My name is Allison Kirk-Montgomery and I'm at the Ukrainian Canadian Care Center on 60 Richview Road in Toronto, the residence of the Honourable John Yaremko. I'm here, I'm interviewing Mr. Yaremko on behalf of the Law Society of Upper Canada for our project called "Diversifying the Bar; Lawyers Make History." Also present is Hélène Yaremko-Jarvis, a lawyer also and a niece of Mr. Yaremko. When we left off last time you had just finished proposing to your wife, successfully, offering her all of the Falls in North America if I remember correctly. But before you return to her -- I know Mary is an important part of your story -- I wanted to ask you a few more questions about law school and your life at law school. So, I know you belonged to the University Law Club, you were the President and you were in the Debating Club. What other aspects of your life at law school would you like to tell me about?

JY: That's at the University of Toronto Law School.

AKM: Yes and also Osgoode. Anything else about your life there.

JY: I chose to go to the University of Toronto Law School because the university had scholarships. I had to have scholarships in order to be able to continue.

AKM: I remember.

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JY: And very fortuitously I won eleven years' tuition. I took six at the U of Toronto and five at the Osgoode Hall.

AKM: Yes, because Osgoode in those days hardly offered any scholarships if I remember correctly.

JY: They gave medals and prizes. That was surprising. Of course, you see, I think that in those days, becoming a lawyer for someone who couldn't afford to be a lawyer was something you never dreamed of. That's why there was no pressure on the institution to supply [funding]. And they had a monopoly anyway so they were not in competition as today's universities are to get good students. You could only become a lawyer one way and that was to pass the Osgoode Hall examinations. Or, to be in practice for about seven years as apprenticeship people. I knew two lawyers, both of whom had become lawyers through apprenticeship, articleship I think is the word.

AKM: Now, you mentioned one. I think Mr. Humeniuk.

JY: I think there was one more and his name escapes me.

AKM: Were they both in Hamilton?

JY: Toronto. Humeniuk did very well because later on, when I had to have articleship, I was articulated to him. He knew all about the articles and I think he paid me badly, a couple of dollars a week. He got a real bargain.

AKM: And this was in Toronto. Where was that office?

JY: At Bay and Queen

AKM: At Bay and Queen.

JY: Yeah, he had one of the nicest offices. It was down at the front of City Hall. He had an extra room and when I was called to the bar, after I came out of the army, I used a room in his office as my office. We didn't go into a partnership or anything like that, neither of us wanted it, but we both got along well together. He and I had the same community interests and we got along very well in that respect.

AKM: Was there a large Ukrainian community in Toronto at that time?

JY: There wasn't a large community in comparison to the size of present day community. But they were all mainly active people. I guess that's why they were in Canada because they were people who desired, somehow, to make a better or greater life for themselves. They chose to come to Canada, and like these two lawyers, they could never have become lawyers under the Austro-Hungary empire. Even today, I'm amazed that the Austro-Hungary Empire that produced the music, the ballets, the operas. So the possibility of any of these gentlemen like Theodore Humeniuk and others to become lawyers was out of the question. It could never happen. But they knew what a lawyer was and they tried to reach for it.

The Ukrainian situation was complicated because thousands of them were interned during the First World War and just this past year reached a settlement with the federal government about reparations for this. What happened was that all their documents were also Austro-Hungarian documents. Nothing said "Ukrainian." During

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the war, Austro-Hungary was part of the German Empire and they were at war with Canada. So, all these men that were over here were put into internment camps.

AKM: And I understand that many others were registered as enemy aliens as well.

JY: On their passport, their country of origin was Austro-Hungary. There was no Ukraine.

HYJ: What happened at that time was that the western Ukraine was under the Hungarian empire and eastern Ukraine was under the Russia, and the Russians wouldn't allow the Ukrainians in this section to emigrate. So, all the early Ukrainians came from western Ukraine which is where both my grandparents came from because Austro-Hungary allowed people to emigrate, right?

JY: Yes.

HYJ: But they all had Austro-Hungarian passports and of course when the war broke out they were seen to be enemy aliens, as you say.

JY: I worked in the summertime for the Steel Company of Canada. When war broke out, word came down from Ottawa that no person of Italian origin could continue to work for the Steel Company of Canada. They were all sent home. I was working and talk was going all around the place so I talked to the superintendent.

I said, "This is crazy!" I said, "You're going to have to shut the plant down!" I said, "Ninety-nine percent of the men working in the steel company furnaces are Italian."

He said, “Yes, I know that. I don’t know what to do.”

I said, “You get on the telephone to Ottawa and say that if they want to stop producing steel in Canada—” [laughter]

AKM: That’s not going to help the war effort, is it?

JY: All that extra steel [needed] for the guns and everything. That was a very important part of winning the war. The United States came in and supplied all that steel. So the superintendent sent taxi cabs, [laughing] sent all the cabs in Hamilton to go in to these addresses and pick up the Italian immigrants and bring them back to work. I was sent home because I was sort of an assistant to the work going on. If the work stopped, I had nothing to do so. They didn’t quite shut it down because once it is shut down, where they make the molten steel, it takes a week to get it back into the flow of things.

AKM: Is this when you were at law school?

JY: Yes.

AKM: Were there any friends of yours that were also non-Anglos that were law students at the time?

JY: No.

AKM: Really! That must have been a lonely experience.

JY: For me, it was excitement. I won the scholarships for University College, which at that time had the supervision of the law school. The law school was an Honour Law Degree. That’s the degree you got – it was an honour degree in law.

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HYJ: It was an undergraduate degree.

JY: Undergraduate, that's the way it operated. But then, after finishing up you had to begin all over again. First, second, third year.

AKM: At Osgoode.

JY: At Osgoode. Which meant that from an examination standpoint, the University of Toronto students did much better on their exams than those who went into Osgoode Hall.

AKM: Directly.

JY: [They did better] than those who articulated at the same time. I won scholarships there and everywhere I was a great student. Why I was a great student is I knew if I wanted to get anywhere I had to be not just a lawyer, I had to be an unusual one. It didn't turn out that way anyway because most of my clients turned out to be Ukrainian and they didn't have the money to get involved in litigation. It was mostly the transfer of property and estate work, estate work.

HYJ: Can I ask you a question, Uncle John? Allison was asking you about other memories from when you were at U of T. Was it at U of T that you used to work for a professor after school putting away the books or something, and he would pay you a bit and—

AKM: Who was that?

JY: It was one of the law professors, [Frederick Auld], who was doing what was called the Canadian Abridgement. The Canadian Abridgement was a short documentation, in short form for all the cases tried in the courts of Canada...He got to know the fact that I had no money (but I got along). So he used to pay me. I'd go in on Friday afternoon and put each book [that the professor had using in researching the abridgements] back in its proper place on the library shelf and he'd pay me \$2.00. Then on Monday he'd start again. And \$2.00 meant that I ate on Saturday and Sunday, quite good.

HYJ: That was a lot then. Really.

JY: It's hard to [imagine] in this day and age, although I am very much disappointed in Toronto, how slow they are to do anything about the poverty line. You see, my family back in Hamilton, they were poor but they didn't know it. There was no television, there was nothing for anybody to want or need money or want money to acquire things.

AKM: It must have cost a lot to feed and clothe ten children though.

JY: I don't know how my mother did it! It puzzles me. Now there are only two or three kids in a family. I remember seeing the diet from the old country and one of the famous soups was cabbage soup. My father used to buy a pickup truckload of cabbages and we'd be sitting there, each child, all shredding the cabbage which went into barrels and—what did they do with it?

HYJ: Sauerkraut. [The family] made sauerkraut. I remember that.

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JY: Sauerkraut. And so for ten dollars worth of cabbage, he'd get a couple of barrels of sauerkraut from which this soup was made. And we had that yesterday, here.

I got along extremely well with the professors, became president of the Law Club at the University so I had this additional contact with the professors apart from the classroom. I was a good student. Now, teachers, professors, they don't play any favourites but boy do they like good students.

AKM: Who did you call as your friends in those days? Did you have time to have friends and fun?

JY: No, No. There was one chap from Hamilton that I spent a lot of time with.

AKM: Another student?

JY: Another student. A law student. He became the Chief Justice of Ontario. Charles Dubin. We spent a lot of time together and his parents promoted that relationship because I was a "good boy" and they were aware that I was a good boy and that I would be a good influence on him rather than a bad influence in any way.

AKM: Were they right?

JY: Yes, they were right. We did all kinds of things together. We kept each other busy but there was no time for girls or that kind of aspect of young men's lives.

AKM: What about the social life at Osgoode like the great nights or the..

JY: There was very little social life at that time. There was, on the campus, a dance every Friday night and [laughter] I got in because I helped the band master carry

his drum in. [laughter] Nobody stopped me, nobody asked me, as they were walking I just walked through with the drum and nobody stopped me so I guess they accepted me.

Then, we graduated from Osgoode Hall. I went into the army and he went to practise law and our lives became separate at that stage.

AKM: So, you went into the army. The Second World War must have revived a lot of painful memories for many Ukrainians, of what had happened in the First?

JY: Not really, not really. You see, the First World War was caused by the Austro-Hungary empire but by time the Second World War went on, [the Ukrainians were not on the wrong side].

AKM: Yes.

JY: There wasn't anybody interned or anything.

AKM: From the Ukrainian community?

JY: After the war, we set up a branch of the Canadian Legion, Branch 360, and it had all the Second World War veterans, including those from Europe who had fought against the Germans and Canadians, so we had our own branch.

HYJ: It was set up by Ukrainians and it was given a Ukrainian name in honour of a Ukrainian, right?

JY: Yes. In the First World War there was a Ukrainian that got the Victoria Cross so this branch was named—

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HYJ: Was it Filip Konowal, something like that?

JY: You've got a good memory!

HYJ: Well, you tell me all these stories [laughter].

JY: Filip Konowal was found, he was a caretaker. He slopped and washed the floors—

HYJ: This is after the war.

JY: After the war, in Ottawa.

HYJ: In the Parliament Buildings.

JY: Somebody must have found him – here was a Victoria Cross winner, washing floors.

AKM: So, there was a strong Ukrainian Canadian patriotism associated with that.

JY: Oh, yes.

AKM: But before that, before you went to war, did you feel Canadian or Ukrainian Canadian, what did you—?

JY: Oh, I was Canadian. First of all, there was no Ukraine.

AKM: Yes, but how did you refer to yourself?

JY: Oh, I referred to myself as a Ukrainian born in Canada.

AKM: Yes, a new entity.

JY: Even though my parents, I knew, had come from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The interesting thing about the Austro-Hungarian Empire was that they treated their lower classes quite well. They didn't do anything for them, or help them or anything, but they did not mistreat them as some of the other countries, both in Europe and in Asia, have done with their minorities.

AKM: Do you think that might have something to do with how the Ukrainian Canadians were active as you describe?

JY: Well actually, they were active, active in their own groups. They formed groups to give themselves insurance and that type of thing. The state did not go out of its way to assist.

For example, I as a lawyer needed to raise money by way of mortgages for people who are buying houses. I tried to get the money from the banks and they wouldn't lend money on a mortgage to anybody. Not just Ukrainian but anybody who fell into the immigrant class. [laughter] I said, This is ridiculous! You won't lend them money and they won't take a mortgage from you unless it's an open mortgage so they can pay it off anytime. You cannot get them to sign a closed mortgage but the banks had no right to give open mortgages. There was a clash between the banks and [the immigrants]. Although the numbers of newcomers exceeded the [established Canadians] in those days, in general, the banks ignored the newcomers, the immigrants. They had nothing to do with them. My father would never sign a closed mortgage. He wanted to have the right to save the money up and pay the mortgage up. That was the first thing that people wanted to do is pay off the mortgage.

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AKM: Well, how did they manage then?

JY: All the extra money—I mean the money that was not spent for living, they didn't acquire anything. They didn't acquire cars, at least at that time. The money was just what they needed to eat and that's it—

HYJ: And where did they get the mortgage? If the banks wouldn't give them a mortgage.

JY: Oh, the vendor, would have to give them the mortgage.

HYJ: A take back mortgage from the vendor.

JY: They would take the mortgage back.

AKM: Is that something that you as a lawyer would be helping arrange for them?

JY: Oh yes, I'd try and do this. Certain people would lend for a much longer period of time, and I had money in the bank. In those days I think the bank was paying one and a half percent interest on the money.

AKM: Sounds familiar.

JY: Oh, I don't know what they do now but they charged 6 or 7 percent on the mortgages. Even at that rate, the people would be assisted. Home ownership was a drive and in the old country, home ownership was a thing that was beyond the grasp of most people.

AKM: Did your parents manage to buy a home?

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JY: They rented [for much of the time].

HYJ: Well, they had 262 Kensington, in Hamilton, from when I was a child. I've seen pictures from when I was about 2 years old.

*[HYJ: According to my aunts, my grandparents, Uncle John's parents, owned a house in Welland which they lost due to being late on a mortgage payment. Thereafter they rented, including in Hamilton where they moved for work. They lived on Case, Gerrard, and Chestnut Streets, and these are the houses Uncle John would remember. According to my aunt, Uncle John's sister Anne Holota, Uncle John began university when they lived on Chestnut which is where Aunt Rosalie Yaremko was born in 1937. They bought the house on Kensington a couple of years later and that is where my family, who lived in Quebec, visited at Christmas until my grandfather died and the house was sold.]*

JY: I quite understand that they bought there.

HYJ: And they had tenants on the third floor. *[HYJ: My grandfather finished the attic as a 2 bedroom apartment and for years I remember the tenants being a black family. Mr. Duncan was a porter with CN and had two children – very nice people. I think this shows that my grandparents were not racist in an era when many were.]*

HYJ: Didn't grandpa own a house in Welland though and he lost it because he made a late mortgage payment?

JY: Yes.

HYJ: That was very early on.

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JY: I must admit I don't know. I was about 6 or 7, not old enough to understand. This man, he came to our door and he was treated with a great deal of respect and then we had to call in a neighbour and they signed some papers. The neighbours signed them and I asked my father who was that man? My father told me he was a lawyer. When I became a lawyer, I became aware of what had happened on that occasion. My father had missed a payment.

AKM: One payment?

JY: One payment, not on time. Unknown to him, the mortgage which contained many clauses, had a clause that if the payment was not paid on the due date, the whole mortgage fell due. My father had gone around to the neighbours and the neighbours had loaned him enough money so that he could pay that payment off but the mortgagee, he said, No, I want all of it, all my money.

HYJ: Yes.

JY: One of the great things that I'm proud of is that as a member of the legislature, I put through that mortgages are drawn up in accordance with the Mortgages Act of Ontario and I had the chance to amend the act and to strike that clause out of the mortgage. The mortgagor was able to go to a judge and explain to the judge why he had not paid on time and the judge had the power to look closely at the foreclosing of the mortgage and make it out of order.

HYJ: So my grandfather actually lost the house. Even though he had the money to pay it.

JY: But he was two days late.

AKM: That's terribly unjust. How did they, your parents, feel about the banks, the legal system?

JY: They were just upset, but there was no—there was never a marching on objection. They felt badly at home but they—

HYJ: They didn't know what to do.

JY: There was nothing on the street. My father said, That's it, he's a lawyer. [Another time] another man came to the house and he got a great deal of regard, respect from my parents. They didn't sign any papers at that time. I was 7 years old. I said, What is that man? They said, He's an alderman, he's a politician. So from then on...

[interruption from visitor]

JY: I said, I'm going to be a lawyer-politician.

AKM: And you did, you did.

JY: Yes, [inaudible] as a politician, I was in the legislature for 25 years.

HYJ: He was the longest serving politician in Ontario as a Member of Parliament.

JY: I was a cabinet minister for 15 years

HYJ: Yes.

JY: Yes, longer than any other person. I have had eight portfolios. More than anybody. As a matter of fact if they counted the number of times that I was sworn in to Her Majesty, I probably have more than anybody else in the British Empire.

AKM: Did you get the respect [you hoped for]? From being a lawyer and being a politician.

JY: Oh yes. Oh yes. Very, very, very sincere respect. And I still get it today.

AKM: Good.

JY: All kinds of people walk up to me and call me by name.

AKM: I'm sure. You've touched many lives.

JY: When I was off the campus when I was at university, I lived in a rooming house on Queen Street near Spadina, Queen and Bathurst St....I was going to be a lawyer/politician so I started to walk. Did you know where Queen's Park is?... And the law school was at the Bloor and Spadina, that's right...I would walk from where I lived in the attic. I would walk a different route every day up to the law school so that by the time I was through law school, I had seen every house in my future riding. So, as I met people going about the riding while politicking, I would say, "Where did you live?" and they would say, "Oh, 123 Shaw." I would say, "Oh, you've got that green roof." And I would be right.

It's amazing when you're dealing with people. You can make people close to you if you call them by name. Something about a person's name that if it's the first word you spoke, you become friends for life. I knew where they lived because of the green roof. So

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from the time that I, and especially my wife (she was the one to know how many children there was in a family and how were they doing), so that between the two of us if we met somebody in the street (and we met all of them, dozens of them, on the street, especially during campaigns), we knew a lot about the people that we were going to deal with.

AKM: Now that's you as a politician. Did that apply to being a lawyer as well?

JY: No. No it didn't. My practice, the people in my ward, in my riding, were such that they had to have somebody else, contact with somebody else which was for mortgage money. Mind you, I did appear in court defending people who had charges laid against them for some breach of the law, but not many.

AKM: This is after you were in politics?

JY: That's right, after I was in politics. When I became a cabinet minister, I closed up my office and devoted one hundred percent of my time as a member of the legislature. You see, we had no children and the only responsibility I had was my wife. In the early days, she was a good wife—and she was good looking! She didn't spend any more money than [we had]. After a while, with the money I was making, she became one of the ten best-dressed women in Toronto. I don't know if you recall Zena Cherry [society columnist for the *Globe and Mail*] who wrote that column, a daily column—

AKM: Yes.

JY: It's a pity they don't have it anymore.

HYJ: He loves fashion. He should have been Yves St. Laurent!

JY: Even if you didn't belong to society, it was nice to know what the society people were doing. [My wife] was a very good shopper. We were extremely fortunate, we bought a beautiful home in the riding.

AKM: What was the address?

JY: One Connable Drive, and the only one. Connable Drive was up in St. Clair and Bathurst, Bloor and Bathurst. The reason why it was so nice was [that] the man who had it built for himself was the president of Woolworth's of Canada. He built himself a home up on the hill. He built this home to live in when he came up from the States. He didn't want to drive all the way back downtown to a hotel even though there were some fine hotels in those days. So the quality was [there].

AKM: What year did you buy that?

HYJ: You lived with Auntie Mary's parents for a few years after getting married and then you bought 1 Connable Drive.

AKM: What year did you get married?

JY: We celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup>; subtract 60 from...

HYJ: 1944, was it?

AKM: So, that's the year you were called to the bar *in persona*, was it? I think so?

JY: Yes.

AKM: You got married that year. And you started your practice.

JY: We lived with her parents for 5 years. I could never understand the mother in law jokes.

AKM: You had a good one, did you?

JY: Oh, I could do no wrong!

AKM: Tell me about those first five years then, in terms of your practice. A little bit more about your law practice.

JY: The practice was—[the clients saw me about] either minor charges of some kind—

AKM: Criminal?

JY: Criminal. But never any notable murders or anything like that. Lesser charges. There also was the litigation side. As people became better off and they were buying these homes, I acted for a lot of them. Most of the homes now occupied by other than British people in my riding will show that I acted for many of them. First of all, I could understand their problems and I treated them with a great deal of respect. It's surprising but, even the most sophisticated people, if they meet somebody that they are unfamiliar with, don't behave nicely to them—at least not in those days, maybe now because we have such a mix of society, [with the kids all playing soccer]. But there's still a divide between those who have money and (because of going back several generations in Canada) the newcomers. I'd call anybody until about ten years a newcomer. It takes about ten years for a newcomer to know his or her way around. The interesting thing was

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the kids in the Catholic schools were playing soccer, which was really not a Canadian thing, not like baseball, but it would be interesting to know (and they're Catholic), what their backgrounds are.

AKM: That would be like the riding you represented—in those days, very diverse.

JY: Very, very diverse.

AKM: So your practice was not just Ukrainian immigrants, newcomers, but all non-Anglos.

JY: Not all, it was by word of mouth. I would obtain a client because he would live next door to a Ukrainian, and in that area...somebody was constantly moving. That area, Spadina, Bathurst and Queen, that area was one of the most diverse areas in Toronto. The British people were still very prominent in occupying at least one half of the riding but they were not monied, with very few skilled workmen [inaudible].

AKM: But a hard place to make a living as a lawyer.

JY: Oh yes. But I liked it. When I became a member of the legislature, I had the additional income as a member, which at that time was not all that great. When the clerk asked me how I wanted to get paid I said, "Get paid?"

He said, "We can pay you yearly or monthly."

I said, "I get paid? To be a member of the legislature?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, “You know how much I get paid?”

He said, “Fourteen hundred dollars a year.”

I said, “If you had asked me for a fourteen hundred dollar admission fee, I would have paid you! Get paid to be a member!” Members today, however, do not have the problems they had in those days.

AKM: Really. That’s interesting.

JY: In those days, almost daily in the newspapers, there would be a write-up if a member made a speech and what he said, or a what a cabinet minister said if they were introducing legislation. That was back then. When I became a member of the cabinet, I closed up my office.

AKM: So that when you first became a member of the legislature, that would have changed your law practice, or not? I mean, introducing new clients because of that?

JY: No, no, it didn’t. The type of matter that those clients were interested in did not generally come into the scope of legislature. As a member of Parliament, I acted as a lawyer... but when I became a cabinet minister, by that time my practice as a lawyer was big enough for me to have started to put money in the bank to save.

AKM: This is about five or six years later?

JY: Yes and as I say, I liked it. When I became a cabinet minister, I called up my friend (because he was a member of one of the trust companies, one of the finance companies in Toronto) He was my neighbour, in the same vicinity, and he acted as my

official agent raising money. I called him and I said, “I want you to sell me out, big time, sell me out.” I had about six or seven stocks.

HYJ: You mean he was your stock broker? [HYJ: His name was John Ridley, Uncle John’s friend, neighbour, and insurance/investment broker.]

JY: He said, “You’re foolish. They’re good investments.”

[inaudible] He said, “Well, it’s your decision.”

And by Tuesday I had sold all the shares I owned. If I may say so, if I had kept those shares that I had I would be a multi-millionaire because of the stock. His advice was good and my decision wasn’t.

AKM: So your decision was not the typical one for someone going into cabinet.

JY: That’s right.

HYJ: You weren’t required to do that.

JY: We weren’t required to do that. The only requirement that cabinet members had—Bill Davis introduced it—you couldn’t own two homes at a time. There was a time here when prices for homes were escalating and people were buying and selling. And he sold me out. The reason I mention that was that my wife and I, at that time, became owners of land on the [Niagara] escarpment. Do you know the escarpment?

AKM: Yes.

JY: Well, [inaudible], [I was] a junior officer and I had acquired a walkie-talkie. An officer would carry the telephone by himself and back at headquarters or in the field

would be the battery and we could always be in touch with whatever was going on from headquarters. So walking became a favourite sport of mine and we would go up on the escarpment, which we found one day going to Guelph, Ontario. I would walk through the forest and tell my wife I walked 50 steps south and 30 steps east, 200 west. The forest was so dense up there.

HYJ: You were using the walkie-talkies with her.

JY: Yes, I was talking with her in case I got lost. The land up against the escarpment, going back, was all rock. The farmers had a difficult time clearing up the rocks any further than they did. It would be about a stretch of land from here to those apartments. So I just took this up for sport. I didn't play golf, I couldn't afford to belong to a golf club, I liked the outdoors, so I would go and do this walking.

AKM: With Mary.

JY: With Mary. She'd be sitting in the car and you can see Toronto from the escarpment. It's beautiful.

AKM: Did you buy some of the land?

JY: I did, I bought the land. By that time, they were burning oil, you know, in homes.

HYJ: Central heating?

JY: Yes, heating. Everybody had oil.

AKM: Yes, that's right

JY: So, the farmers had oil to burn so they didn't need the wood for cooking or heat so I was able to buy [forested land]. Because it was so rocky, it had never been cleared. The rest of the farm had excellent soil. So I went to the farmer and he had no use for it. It was just a nuisance. So I bought a hundred acre parcel and a 200 acre parcel that had water on it and beautiful trees.

Beautiful! Can you imagine ? Magnificent! As it so happened, the Boy Scouts of Canada had a camp on the edge because of the surroundings. My money man, John Ridley, was the provincial head of the Boy Scouts so he had occasion to visit this [area]. The Boy Scout camp was on the edge of the forest. He said, "No, that area's too beautiful to belong to any one person."

I said, "What am I going to do with it?"

He said, "Give it to the province."

I said, "I'm in no position to give it to the province, I can't afford that."

He said, "You sell me half of the land, and you will join me in giving it to the people of Ontario."

And so, I did that, and we gave the land. My parcel of the trees was about one hundred acres and the one with the lesser trees, all trees and water, it had two [hundred]. It had this cold water coming up from the ground, a spring.

AKM: It was a lovely gift to the province, to the people.

JY: I gave it to the people. You know I have maps that show the park and the forest.

A friend of mine called me in the middle of the night and he said, “Go and get the *Toronto Star*.”

I said, “Why?”

He said “Terrible, terrible.”

I went and got the *Star* and read, “Yaremko makes money off provincial deal.” I’ve never seen in print such lies before in the *Toronto Star*, which in those days was not the best of Conservative supporters.

Well, I didn’t know what in the world had happened. I tried to get the information but nobody would talk to me. I wanted an apology from the *Star* or else—I brought it to the attention of John Ridley. What had happened is, if you give anything to the province, you get a tax receipt. A gift of any kind to anybody. And this was not a major tax gift because we hadn’t put a value, we couldn’t put a value, on the land. [inaudible] So it was just the same as what I paid for it. I got a tax receipt for the whole thing.

AKM: Is this when you were in the cabinet?

JY: I was in the cabinet.

AKM: The sixties maybe?

JY: I guess it would be. Yes, the late 60s. Of course it hit the legislature and it was a madhouse when it opened and then the leader of the NDP, Glen Upjohn, demanded an explanation of me. And in the course of demanding the explanation, he read the headline, the whole thing.

AKM: He underlined it again.

JY: We were in touch with the *Star* and threatened to sue them unless they made an apology. At first they wouldn't make an apology and then I got a telephone call from a law student from Osgoode Hall Law School. He said, "You'll be interested in this, Mr. Yaremko." He said, "This person from the *Star*, a reporter, was talking to us and I asked him why did they publish this story when Mr. Yaremko has detailed the facts to the legislature, just like any other ordinary citizen would have done? Nothing unusual about it."

...So the *Star* man said, "Well, you know, we had two reporters working for six months on that story and that costs us. Two times six months' pay is a lot of money to have invested in a story. And we had no alternative but to publish the story to get our money back."

I was shocked.

AKM: It sounds like politics is a tough world to be in.

JY: Remember, I had called John Ridley up and said, "Sell me out." So my lawyer said, "Just to show you what kind of a man John Yaremko is, he sold all his shares in all his companies, it's gone."

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It wasn't a huge sum. It was about \$4,000.00 here, \$4,000.00 there, whatever. He says, "Bank stock!...Now what could a member of the legislature have to do with a bank. They can't even walk in the door. That's a federal bank, banking is a federal matter."

So he produced this sell-out order and there were all these companies listed, there wasn't a great many of them. So that was the tipping point, I think, that the *Star* lawyer realized that that could be brought up in a libel suit. [What I did] was an extraordinary right thing for a member of the government to do because they are entitled to invest their money the same as anybody else. The *Star* got the message that they can't take advantage of it anyway.

AKM: Just like you had to be not just a lawyer but a very good lawyer, you couldn't be just an ordinary legislator.

JY: That's right.

HYJ: He was given an apology. I was either a teenager or in my twenties when all this happened. I remember it vividly. I lived in Quebec and the apology ended up being the typical little short thing on page 22 or something in the *Star*. Nowhere near the coverage they gave to the headline.

JY: But then, about three weeks after they published it, a couple of other members, there was two of them, one was from northern Ontario, got himself in with the gas pipeline and made a lot of money.



So, it really was a very extraordinary, right thing for me to do. It had cost me savings... Oh! They were talking about the difficulties that Bill Davis was having with his cabinet. So and so doing this, so and so doing that, [laughs] and John Yaremko with his land. Two months after the fact.

AKM: Did the cabinet members support you?

JY: Oh yes. You could tell by the nature of the man. You sit around the table for three or four hours, once a week sometimes, you get to know not just the man but you know if he's the kind of a man that you can rely on and everything. What had happened is that I had gone to [Premier] Bill Davis and said that I'm not going to run anymore. I always felt badly. I had made up my mind—this is before the land deals.

AKM: Why did you decide that you weren't going to run?

JY: Twenty-five years—oh, I know why, I heard somebody refer to me as being “the old guard.” I was young, very young, but—

AKM: You'd be, what, in your 50's?

JY: Fifties, I guess, fifty-one. But if you get that stigma of being a member of the old guard—and the thing that Bill Davis was very anxious about was that he wanted to show how young his cabinet was. Now, the trees, the land business—

HYJ: That was the last straw.

JY: That was it, the last straw, and so he accepted my resignation. Well, he had no alternative. I said, “I have already written a letter to my constituency that I’m not going to run.” Unfortunately, [even after the *Star* apologized], I didn’t think I could, in the face of saying I’m not going to run, decide to run. Although I might have run— [inaudible] To this day I feel very badly...I was the kind of a person, I not only brought in myself but I brought votes to all of the members, Toronto members, getting votes by reason of my association. The public by that time had accepted the fact that I was an extraordinarily good cabinet minister and much of what they, or what the government had done, starting with that mortgage business, the health [portfolio].

I’ll bet you there’s one in a thousand who knows what OHAP stands for. Do you know what OHAP stands for? Do you know what OHIP stands for?

AKM: Yes.

JY: Well, OHAP preceded OHIP.

AKM: Ontario Health—

JY: Ontario Hospital Assistance Plan. The Ontario government paid for the hospital. Not for the health care. Just for the room and board for the hospital which was a tremendous help at that time to people because that often was a big proportion of the total.

AKM: And this was one of the programs that you were very actively for.

JY: Yes. When I was there, most of the cabinet was made up of, in those days, of successful businessmen or farmers who did not need the income at all in their retirement

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years, having succeeded well in preparation for it. So, nothing related to income could affect them negatively. I never met one (although there was just that one man from northern Ontario), that said they bought and sold shares of a company but they were all successful and savers and we were getting paid fourteen hundred dollars a year. Now the pay as a member (the last time I saw it was about three years ago) was about one hundred and forty thousand dollars. I'm not objecting to it at all as a taxpayer because if he's doing his job for the people of Ontario, then those members would be well worth it. The newspapers don't play that up very much anymore. They used to. But you know, a young man or the professional, if he went out and got himself a job for a hundred and forty thousand dollars, he could get along very nicely as compared to fourteen hundred.

AKM: So when you retired, from politics, your financial situation would not have been very secure, I don't think, would it?

JY: No.

AKM: Did you go back into practice then?

JY: No, I didn't go back into practice. I said to my wife—Oh, we were at the [laughs] we were at the cemetery for [Mary's] parents, visiting her parents' grave and I saw a woman sighing. She was standing on a grave, pounding her foot. I wondered what in the world she was pounding her foot for. Then I realized if I had died (my wife was very much in love with me, and I with her, after all of 60 years), she could have gone to my grave [and pounded on it too].

“I gave you the best years of my life but what did you leave me, nothing!” I realized, apart from the house, which at that time was paid for, we had nothing. Just enough in the bank to turn over, enough to live comfortably, but nothing more. So I withdrew from active life in organizations and became an expert in business. First of all, I was astonished at how much you need to know to become an expert and it’s too bad that the average, ordinary citizen doesn’t have the time or the means or the knowledge to study. I think I spent about three years and I saw the ways and means of investing money.

HYJ: Uncle John, can we leave the investment just temporarily, because Allison was asking about law and we are kind of moving away from law. I think she’d be interested in your story about when you were a cabinet minister, or actually, when you were minister without portfolio, and the Premier called you in and told you to solve the problem with the Law Society and—

AKM: That certainly would be interesting!

HYJ: Yes, that’s a good story.

JY: In any event, Mary never got the benefit. She spent no more money after I made it than before. I’m now in the process of giving away my estate... [inaudible]

HYJ: You gave \$600,000.00 to U of T law school. But tell her, that’s a good story about—

AKM: What happened when the Premier came and told you to solve the problem?

HYJ: Remember when Osgoode Hall and U of T were fighting over the legal education?

JY: Yes. That was [Premier] Les Frost. I was a private member then. I remember.

HYJ: That was a long time ago.

JY: He called me in and he said, “You went to Osgoode Hall?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “You went to the university?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “Do you know about the argument that’s going on?”

I said, “Yes.

HYJ: Tell her what the argument was.

JY: It was about teaching at the law school.

AKM: Just give me a little background.

JY: At the Osgoode Hall Law School, they trained lawyers. And the work of a lawyer, a lot of it, is just straight mundane things. The University of Toronto’s curriculum was constitutional law, labour law, all the different types of law that govern people, but they’re not the kind of law that is bread and butter for people.

HYJ: Yes, less practitioners, more academic.

JY: What happened is that this argument had been going on for years, this whole business. The *Globe and Mail* used to publish an article every Thursday that the province has jurisdiction over the teaching of law... The province should do something about this—

AKM: About the argument that the universities wanted to break Osgoode's monopoly?

JY: I never did use the word "monopoly." But they figured lawyers for law men. Law school for lawyers, not for the law professors. It so happens that the law professors at the University of Toronto, at that time, were tops in their field.

AKM: Was that Caesar Wright?

JY: Caesar Wright had resigned from Osgoode Hall and gone over [to U of T]. And he took with him a young man, the future justice of Canada.

AKM: Bora Laskin?

JY: Bora Laskin. He was a young professor. That's who went over to the law school. There was a major toss-up.

HYJ: So was there an argument about how lawyers should be educated and who should educate them?

JY: That's right. How a lawyer should be educated and who should educate them. However, there was a place for the practice of law. You had to be able to witness a

document, learn procedure, or whatever. But as I say, constitutional law, labour law, there were others—

HYJ: Contracts, torts, no?

JY: No, not contracts or torts. The law, provincial, international...

AKM: But the dispute wasn't about who had the right to grant the degree, was it?

JY: No, who had the right to call their learned graduates lawyers.

When you're finished a law course at university, you had an honour degree in law.

AKM: But you weren't a lawyer.

JY: You weren't a lawyer. You were nowhere near a lawyer because you had to start all over again.

AKM: All over again at Osgoode.

JY: In the first year. In some ways, that was an advantage for the university people because it was easier for them to pass the exams but not necessarily so because the subjects ranged quite differently.

AKM: It's a longer time [required] too. So what did you do?

JY: Well, what do I do? [inaudible] Frost said settle it!

HYJ: I remember you telling me that when you were called to the Premier's office, you were very junior, and you thought, Oh my goodness, is this going to be good news or bad news?

JY: I knew I hadn't done anything wrong [laughs] so I was pretty excited. It was going to be—

AKM: An opportunity.

JY: An opportunity. But, settle it? That's all he said to me. I walked out and thought how in the world am I going to settle it? Then I decided this. I invited to lunch at Simpson's Acadian Court – you know Simpsons?—

AKM: I do, yes.

JY: All the lawyers downtown all had their lunches there. There were two people who spoke on behalf of the two different groups. One became the Chief Justice.

HYJ: Bora Laskin.

JY: I guess it was Bora Laskin. The other was the head of the Law Society.

HYJ: The Treasurer?

JY: The Treasurer of the Law Society. And the Treasurer of the Law Society was tops as a lawyer...Both the best in their field! There was no doubt, and they were the two who got really into the argument. We had sat down for lunch, why, we weren't even served. I called Bora Laskin who was a friend of Caesar Wright, and Bob Macaulay, a young member whose father had been Attorney General. I think there were four of us. I could sense as the lawyers came in, they all thought, "What are those four guys up to?" All of a sudden these four lawyers—[laughs]

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HYJ: Everybody else was coming in to the dining room.

JY: Of course, with the Attorney General Dana Porter there, everybody was bowing to Dana Porter, to make sure he saw them, because he was the one who appointed the Queen's Counsel. I knew that they were all wondering, What are those guys up to? To a man.

And so we agreed that Bora Laskin was going to go back to Caesar Wright. And Dana Porter and Bob Macaulay were going to go to the Treasurer of the Law Society and tell them, "This is it. Settle it or the government is going to settle it for you. And nobody will be happy."

HYJ: Well, that's what Uncle John told them. Either they had this opportunity to settle it, or the government was going to do it. So Uncle John said, "Well, it's in your best interests to get your act together."

JY: Once I said that, everybody agreed. Within five minutes we had nothing further to discuss. What they would do is go back and they should get in touch with the university presidents and work something out. That Les Frost was such a good politician. He said, "You tell Osgoode Hall that if they operate a law school under this scheme then they would be entitled to grants, just as the universities get the grants."

AKM: Yes, persuasive.

JY: Very persuasive, but very very political. "Don't forget to tell them that," he said. The lawyers were having a difficult time with their law school because there were

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more and more young men wanting to be lawyers and they didn't have enough chairs for them. So to get money for a building was [a great inducement].

They went to the newspapers and said they had reached an arrangement that the university presidents would meet in order to decide on the question of teaching law in Ontario. The House was in session. It sat on Wednesday. The House prorogued. Then Premier Les Frost called an election. We got ninety-eight out of a hundred and eight seats! Not an argument in the campaign, nothing! Never did a government have such a majority of seats. So I made quite an impression on Les Frost.

And it so happened that that summer, the Hungarians rose up in protest to the Communist control by Russia.

HYJ: 1956.

JY: The Russian tanks had moved in and the people had fled from Hungary into Austria. I went to Les Frost and told him about this and said, "I just read in the newspapers about what's happening overseas there. I think you should announce that we're going to let the Hungarians into Ontario."

He said, "Well, immigration's a federal matter."

I said, "Who's going to object? People are running away, fleeing, from the Communist system."

The papers were saying that this was the rich people fleeing from Hungary. So I said to Frost, "There's only one way to do it and that's to send me overseas to see what's happening over there." I think the papers on a Wednesday or a Thursday said that I was leaving for Austria. The next day, the federal people—that's the Liberal government -- under Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, he was a very smooth shrewd politician—announced that now the two governments were involved, the federal government wanted the benefit of coming to the rescue.

[And that meant Jack] Pickersgill. He was flying over on the Monday and he had the Royal Canadian Air Force, whereas I had to wait until Tuesday before I could get a flight to Austria. But what he didn't know is that the Ontario government doesn't have ambassadors but they do have representatives in the capital cities. Our man was a real go-getter. Go go go. By the time I got over there, he had tied up everything. Pickersgill was lucky to get a room for himself! Our chap had enjoyed himself tremendously because he didn't have much to do as a representative of Ontario. When I spoke to Frost, I happened to remember that after the [Second World] War, the federal government of that day had rented ten planes from the United States and they brought the people of London—whoever in London wanted to come to Canada, could come on these particular flights.

So I said to Frost, "What you do is you rent the planes." All the planes that were available were rented to Ontario. The British government used the Air Force for it.

I got a tremendous reputation for being "that nice man from Canada." When I was shaking hands, I used to go to the border of Austria and Hungary, where the Russians were on that other side—they were shooting people! The *Globe and Mail* reporter came  
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with me; he was with me all the time. He said, "Get shot, John! I'll put you on the front pages of the world's newspapers."

I said, "Get shot!" He said, "Only a flesh wound."

"At three hundred feet, I'll only get a flesh wound?" I said.

My father worked at the steel company, so he had hands that were like the soles of my shoes, leather. You see these hands, these are the hands of a lawyer, you can tell. They've never changed in a lifetime. So I was going around and shaking hands with everybody.

HYJ: The refugees.

JY: The refugees, and I was testing their hands. I found out, first the soft hands, then the leather hands, a mixture. Because they were coming through the woods and swamps, you couldn't tell by their clothing, whether they were well-dressed or what they were.

So we brought over, in two weeks then, 38,000 Hungarians!

AKM: Amazing.

JY: It was like a shuttle. They'd cross the border and head for the nearest church or school and sleep on the floor. The next day they would be taken to the airport and put on planes and arrive in Canada here, in schools or churches or wherever they were going. As a result of that, in 2006, the government of Austria awarded me the highest award they give to a non-citizen.

HYJ: The Gregory. It has this big medal.

AKM: Congratulations.

JY: A beautiful medal. For me it was a real experience. Very emotional. I was affected. I'd get on the telephone to Mary and she would say, "Stop crying! This is costing me ten dollars."

AKM: It must have taken you right back to your childhood, did it?

JY: Oh, yes, the whole experience was tied in together with the fact that I'd grown up with these people, and I knew them. I was careful. I didn't want to do the wrong thing. To admit ten thousand, twenty, thirty thousand, forty thousand people that you don't know anything about. But the Hungarians are very good people. You never hear of them getting into any difficulty in Canada here. I've never had one bad thing pointed out to me. They've added to the community. The Helicon Ball, which is one of the two big balls held annually in Toronto, is a beautiful display on behalf of the women of Hungary.

Where was I then? I was practising law, I guess, still.

AKM: In 1956?

JY: Yes. I was still practising law.

HYJ: But he was an MPP.

JY: After the settlement with the Law Society, the benchers they got this extra money.

AKM: Funding.

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JY: And then York University came into being. Who else is there? Hamilton.

HYJ: In terms of Law Schools?

AKM: There's sixteen now, isn't there, in Canada.

HYJ: Ottawa, Carleton. There's quite a few.

AKM: Windsor.

JY: All of them. I don't want to be negative about the Law Society, but to become a lawyer in Canada, in Ontario, is a much different from what it was way back when. That is, the law schools, from what I gather, they're all fine law schools. I don't know whether there's a lineup to get in or not but they are all [fine], including York.

HYJ: York now has Osgoode Hall Law School. Because Osgoode Hall Law School moved to York.

JY: Oh, I see. It was the right move. Who calls you to the Bar?

HYJ: The Law Society at Osgoode, where the courts are, at Queen and University. Getting back to my uncle's political career, the Hungarians, and what not—because my uncle John was a trailblazer from the ethnic community, every ethnic group looked to him and he became known as “The People’s Minister.”

AKM: I was going to ask you about that. I read that your nickname was, "The People's Minister.”

HYJ: He was invited to everything. If the Japanese had something he'd be invited, the Latvians, he'd be invited, this and that—

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JY: Because of the level of my father's income, which was very low, I had great understanding of what the poorest people were up against in our society. And then because of being Ukrainian. My riding was almost 50% Italian, and then the Hungarians, so I enjoyed a great relationship with all of them.

AKM: Did being a lawyer help with that, help you understand?

JY: I didn't practise law then. I left it once I entered Cabinet.

HYJ: Allison's wondering if your training as a lawyer and your practice as a lawyer was useful in your career as a politician.

JY: Oh, yes. Yes. The Attorney General, who was in for a long time, often turned to me because of my law school training, to make sure that he was on the right track. Because you know there were the federal powers and the provincial powers.

AKM: Yes, very tricky.

JY: Very tricky, like in bringing the Hungarians.

AKM: So from your university law degree, what you learned there, was important, as opposed to the more practical regular law work you did when you started your practice.

JY: The law school was very—It had Bora Laskin. One of the professors went to British Columbia to become president of the University of British Columbia. So there were top people in their field who taught me about being a law man.

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Incidentally, in each election the number of votes I got increased each time. In the last election I got ten thousand votes more than anybody else had won. Because the riding extended from the lakefront to the north city and nobody knew who lives where. High Park, Forest Hill Village, that was in my riding.

AKM: Very diverse.

JY: Very wealthy. And it's interesting, I got all the votes in the south end, all the votes in the north end. I got votes everywhere.

My legal education helped me a great deal at the Cabinet...A cabinet minister who is a lawyer is apt to look at things in a slightly different way than the pure lawyer. ...There used to be a time when I was asked, "What did you do, Mr. Yaremko?" I used to say I was a professional politician. But I stopped telling them that, because for some reason, politicians are not in favour now. You know, they are [considered] liars, and thieves, and this and that. Although individually they are treated with respect, the term "politician" is not one that is in favour.

One of the greatest politicians that I knew was Les Frost. He followed George Drew as Premier, the man that started the Progressive Conservative government that was in power for 43 years.

AKM: A dynasty.

JY: A long time. I don't know if there was anywhere around the world—

HYJ: Especially in a democracy.



JY: It was a time in Ontario when Toronto got everything. Everybody said, Oh that's Toronto. We can't get our highways, but they have a subway. Every time Toronto got something, the people outside Toronto would call Toronto the H-town. Do you know what the H-town is?

AKM: Hog-town?

JY: That's right. You don't hear that much these days. But Toronto got a subway and we paid for it! But you see, I don't think Hamilton needs a subway system.

And so the Art Gallery used to want to get money from the government. This is before arts support generally. So I said, "Change your name from Art Gallery of Toronto to Art Gallery of Ontario."

AKM: That was very smart.

JY: They did it. They got their five million dollars the next year. Then I found out that the Museum was a department within the University of Toronto. I persuaded the government to take it over. It's now an agency of the government of Ontario. My friend John Robarts said to me one day, "What's so sexy about," (to him everything had to be sexy) "a museum?" I said, "Well, the next time you come to town, you go down to Bloor to the Museum. See all those yellow buses, from all over Ontario, lined up, ten fifteen, twenty buses." I said, "They're up to age fifteen. Those kids are going to be voting in the next election."

They eventually took over the Museum and made it an agency.

HYJ: Of the province.

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AKM: It seems to me that you always had an eye, or an ear, for the outsider.

JR: Pretty well. Pretty well, because of my own background. I don't mean to be derogatory to the people of Forest Hill village. But the people of Forest Hill village are as about far opposed to the people who live down by the lake, as if they would be in two different worlds. In physical geography, that split is where the rise in land is. I managed to have one foot in each camp, because I understood the people of Forest Hill just as much as I understood the people down by the lake.

AKM: Would it be fair to say that your legal studies, your law career, was the method by which you were able to get a foot in each camp?

JY: Because I was dealing as a lawyer, invariably I was dealing with a law firm, who were acting for the people in Forest hill village, whereas I was acting for the individual below the hill. That escarpment, that ridge, is real.

AKM: It's a divider, isn't it?

JY: It's a real divider of class groups. You see, the kids at Upper Canada School, as a group, they're as different from a public school down beneath the hill as they could be.

AKM: Do you think it's any more different than from Gibson School and the Prince of Wales School, in Hamilton, when you grew up? Wasn't it the Gibson Street School?

JY: Oh yes. Gibson Street School, that's where I won my first prize. I stood first in the class. Very wise of them—I got a book plus ten dollars to buy myself a book.

AKM: What did you get and what book did you buy?

JY: The book that I got was a book by Horatio Alger Junior. Do you know Horatio Alger Junior?

AKM: I haven't read him, but I know the kind of book it would be.

JY: That's it, that's it. The guy goes from shoeshine boy to president of the company.

With the ten dollars, I bought second-hand, the *Boys' Own* book. Huge, huge book, it covered a whole broad sphere, not just for things that boys were interested in, but for boys who were growing up and what they would become involved in..

AKM: Like you.

JY: The first prize was given by John Gibson. Sir John Gibson, as it turned out, was a member of the provincial Parliament. And I, of course, wanted to know who was Sir John Gibson. Always this wonderful inquisitive mind, wanting to know what the answers were. And so the teacher told me about Sir John Gibson, who he was and what he had done. I never did find out how he made a living.

...You see, cities begin to have their own personalities, not as a whole, but in parts. The people of Westdale, they may as well be on the moon, so far as the people east

of Kenilworth are. And so it is for every city, that there are these areas. And Westdale, you know Westdale? Westdale is certainly is not wealthy.

AKM: But it is certainly divided from the rest of..

JY: Yes, divided. You know where the Steel Company of Canada is?

AKM: Yes.

JY: I walked from there to Hamilton Central Institute which was under the mountain. Twice a day, walked there, and walked back, and never thought anything of it. That's a long distance to go.

AKM: And you've come a long distance, too, Mr. Yaremko, since then.

JY: I learned my Latin walking. I would walk—*pugno, pugnas, pugnat*—I would stop and look at the book. It didn't do me any harm. The interesting thing is, what ordinarily is claimed as being a hardship, because of the distance to school. It depends on the character of the young person. I was a good boy! You know what good means?

AKM: Yes, I do.

JY: I had a friend, a Polish chap, Charles Zsymlinski, who was a good boy, and we were both good boys together. So all I had to do was say was, "Charles is going," and my mother would say, OK. And he would say to his mother, John is going, and that would be OK, whatever we wanted, we did it.

AKM: I think we should wrap it up since it is almost your dinner time. But I think this is a good point to end on, that you were a “good boy,” a hard worker, all your life.

JR: It didn’t do me any harm! If the parents could only get their kids to work hard, to enjoy what they’re doing. In late August, you read the papers, they’re reporting kids saying, “Oh, we have to go back to school.” I could hardly wait to get back!

AKM: Thank you, Mr. Yaremko.

JY: I was born in Welland, which gave me a background of living in a small, almost country, town. Then I grew up in Hamilton, a steel town. Then Toronto. So I also have that range of communities I lived in, and each community had its own personality and needs. Actually, I must say that it was difficult if not impossible in Toronto, to have become a lawyer of the stature of Charles Dubin, for myself. You couldn’t be a top politician and a top law man in court. I don’t know whether there are any now or not.

AKM: You mean there are different skills and character traits associated with each?

JY: Exactly. Well, the Attorney General, when I was there, wasn’t a lawyer..

HYJ: Well, [the Honourable R. Roy] McMurtry came after you. Are you talking about McMurtry? You overlapped with him a bit.

JY: No, there was another one who lived in Forest Hill, a lawyer, a gentleman's lawyer, but he didn't have to work for a living. He became the Attorney General.

HYJ: My uncle was the first solicitor-general of the province, I heard this just [this] Sunday, and also the first minister of citizenship and immigration.

AKM: A new Cabinet post created.

HYJ: On Sunday, there was an event at a Ukrainian Church in Hamilton. They have set up the first museum in Canada to commemorate the Holodomor, which was when six million Ukrainians were starved by the Russian Communists. My uncle gave a speech and made a donation. He gave a very interesting speech, I was in tears actually. It was about man's inhumanity to man.

JY: That Attorney General. You mentioned his name earlier.

AKM: Dana Porter.

JY: That's right.

HYJ: Julian Porter's father.

JY: He was in society. Is Julian Porter still around?

HYJ: Oh yes, still practising.

JY: His father didn't need to work. He was either married to money or...but it's interesting that Julian has become a top lawyer.

HYJ: Libel and slander is his specialty.

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AKM: I think so.

JY: But he wasn't in that practice of law when the *Star* published that article. That was quite a thing to overcome. Because a lot of people feel where there's smoke there's fire.

AKM: Yes. It was against everything that you had done.

JY: There is the John Yaremko Forest and the Mary Yaremko Forest and park. I have been intending for years to go out there and see how it is doing, but I don't think I'll make it. It's beautiful, beautiful trees.

AKM: Sounds lovely.

JY: I asked the farmer, "How is it you produced this forest"

He said, "Well, my great-grandfather got the Crown grant. He needed the wood for stoves, but he only chose dead trees, lightning trees, fallen trees. Then my grandfather did the same thing, and my father did the same thing and I've done the same thing, all in all."

I said, "You deserve to get a degree from the University of Toronto in forestry. There is don't think there was a degree in forestry then! You are doing exactly what they practised, so that the forest is a controlled forest, each tree beautiful."

AKM: And you managed it too. We have to stop, Mr. Yaremko. You know that I could listen to you forever.

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JY: Well, of course, you realize that I am reliving my life.

AKM: I am enjoying it as you are reliving it. Thank you very much.

JY: It's a personal decision on my part. I hope that I will have the time before I shuffle off. I'm ninety years of age. There's only one older than myself in this place. I've always intended to publish my memoirs. Unfortunately I still have a great many outside interests—

[end]